

INSECTS RECORDED ON OIL PLATFORMS IN 1982

By M. R. YOUNG*

As shown so clearly by Bretherton and Chalmers-Hunt (1983) 1982 was a remarkable year for insect migration to Britain with a number of reasonably distinct waves of immigrants, mainly from the south and south-west, but including some from the south-east. This was reflected in the abundance of catches made for me on various oil platforms in the North Sea and this note comments on the significance of these records.

My recorders catch all insects that they notice, not just moths, but are not working continuously on the oil platforms, and so the samples are regrettably incomplete; however a very clear general pattern emerges, which was also apparent in the records for 1980 summarised by Young (1981). Early in the season, until perhaps mid July, the great preponderance of insect arrivals are hover-flies, whereas later in the season many moths are found and the flies disappear. The Syrphidae which are involved are all common species in Britain, whose general abundance here each year suggests that they do not depend on immigration. In 1982 their arrivals on the platforms often followed periods of south-easterly winds, however, and it seems likely that they travelled to the platforms from the continent, rather than from us. I would welcome comment from dipterists about their likely origins, or about migration of hover-flies in general, knowing only that some species, such as *Scaeva pyrastris*, *Metasyrphus corollae* and *Episyrphus balteatus*, are well known migrants which have been found in great abundance arriving in southern Britain.

Another insect which has now been found several times on oil platforms is the Lacewing *Chrysopa carnea*. Williams (1958) and Stubbs and Chandler (1978) suggest that Syrphidae migrate in association with the aphids on which their larvae prey, and it is suggestive that *C. carnea* is also an aphid predator. Unfortunately aphids are too small to receive the same attention on oil platforms as the flies or moths.

It is not clear why so few butterflies or moths are found on oil platforms in the early season. In northern Britain migrant Lepidoptera are always scarce at this time and their absence on oil rigs may merely reflect this scarcity; however in 1982 obvious species such as the Red Admiral were present in Aberdeenshire in July, whereas the first records of Lepidoptera on the platforms were in August.

The moth records have been noted in detail in Bretherton and Chalmers-Hunt (loc. cit.) and in general they showed the same pat-

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tern as the migrations observed in mainland Britain. Two maxima were obvious, in late September and in late October (corresponding exactly to mainland peaks), and there was a sprinkling of records at other times. The species involved, *Agrius convolvuli* most commonly, also agree with the general pattern, but perhaps surprisingly are not characteristically eastern in origin. In fact most moths arrived during periods of south or south-westerly winds in contrast to the hover-fly arrivals of June. It seems likely that they originated either from the low countries, France or from Britain itself. It will be most interesting to see what reaches the oil platforms if there is a period of easterly migration late in the season such as sometimes occurs.

I am most grateful to the many people who collected specimens for me, and especially to K. Watt for identifying the Syrphidae. A brief summary of the data is included below and detailed Syrphidae records are available from me if needed. Records were received from the following platforms and barges: Forties Charlie; Forties Delta; Fulmar; Auk; Sedco 700 and Sedneth 701. The barges were located in the general area of the platforms, which are roughly midway between Britain and Norway and are east of Aberdeen.

Species Recorded and Dates of Records

Chrysopa carnea Stephens, July, Aug.

Syrphus ribesii (Linn.), July, Aug. *S. torvus* Osten-Sacken, June, July, Aug. *S. vitripennis* Meigen, June, July. *Metasyrphus corollae* (Fab.), June, Aug. *Scaeva pyrastris* (Linn.), July. *Episyrphus balteatus* (Degeer), June, July, Aug. *Helophilus parallelus* (Harris), June.

Plutella xylostella (Linn.), Aug. *Agonopterix heracliiana* (Linn.), Aug. *Agrius convolvuli* (Linn.), Sept., Oct. *Acherontia atropos* (Linn.), Oct. *Phlogophora meticulosa* (Linn.), Oct. *Autographa gamma* (Linn.), Aug.

References

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- Stubbs, A. and Chandler, P. 1978. *A Dipterist's Handbook*. Amateur Entomologists Society.
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THE STATUS OF THE PINE HAWK: *HYLOICUS PINASTRI* L., IN BEDFORDSHIRE. — 1983 m.v. catches show that *Hyloicus pinastri* is now present and thriving throughout the band of Lower Greensand which cuts diagonally across Bedfordshire. It was found to be the commonest hawkmoth in the Woburn Sands area, occurring regularly in high numbers and with 18 appearing in one evening. — K. F. WEBB, Kingsdown Avenue, Luton, Beds LU2 7BU.